

returning male.

**Day Five.** Food items. Two occasions with two grubs, one with a butterfly, but more usually only one grub.

Again several instances of the male getting to within 1 or 2 metres of the nest only to do a clockwise circle or semi-circle before going to the rim of the nest. On one occasion the

male got to within  $\frac{1}{2}$  metre of the nest before retreating 10 metres and repeating its zig-zag approach with all the usual calls and tail pumping. On no occasion was the female observed to do this.

It is hoped that these short notes may provide a basis for further studies on the feeding of the River Chat.

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#### 11. ROOSTING BEHAVIOUR OF FLOCKS OF THE CRESTED BLACK TIT (*PARUS MELANOLOPHUS*)

Mixed species parties of tits, warblers and other small, insectivorous birds are a familiar feature of Himalayan forests outside the breeding season and similar associations are found among forest insectivores in temperate and tropical regions (Moynihan 1962, Morse 1970). MacDonald and Henderson (1977) have described the composition of these flocks in the Kashmir Himalayas in some detail. The most important species involved in such flocks at altitudes above 2300 m in the upper Beas Valley, Himachal Pradesh in November was the Crested Black Tit, more than 50% of the birds often belonging to this species.

On 11 November 1977 I succeeded in following one mixed species flock from 1630 hrs until dark and was therefore able to observe the process of break-up and roosting for some of the participants, which has not previously been described in detail. The flock was feeding among scattered Deodhars (*Cedrus deodar*) at an altitude of 2400 m near the Solang mountain hut, above Manali. The trees

averaged about 30 m in height, with very narrow crowns, and were spaced 10-20 m apart. It was possible for me to follow the flock easily because, despite poor light conditions, the birds were visible in silhouette as they flew from one tree to the next. At 1630 hrs the flock comprised an estimated 83 birds; 65 Crested Black Tits, 5 Green-backed Tits (*Parus monticolus*), 2 White-cheeked Nuthatch (*Sitta leucopsis*), 1 Himalayan Treecreeper (*Certhia himalayana*) and 10 Pallas' Warblers (*Phylloscopus proregulus*).

Between 1630-1700 hrs all species except the Crested Black Tit dropped out of the flock and moved away, presumably to roost solitarily. I continued to follow the tits. Vocalizations increased to a peak at 1700 hrs, most of the calling consisting of the nasal "zee-zee" which is often heard while flocks are feeding. The birds appeared very excited, flitting rapidly from branch to branch, milling about in the topmost branches of one tree and then rapidly crossing to the next in follow my-

leader fashion. At 1705 hrs about 25 birds flew into one tree and within 2-3 minutes became still and silent, apparently perched together about 5 m below the top of the tree. Owing to poor light I could not make out whether they perched in contact with one another, but all must have been within 1 or 2 m. The remainder of the flock distributed themselves in groups of 5-10 in the crowns of neighbouring trees, within 5 m of the top, all being settled by 1715 hrs. Official sunset was at 1710 hrs, but the sun had set well before that behind nearby mountains.

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The first group to settle into their roost was preceded by one bird which gave a loud call "tea-cher" repeatedly from the roosting tree for about a minute. A few minutes after the group had entered the roost one bird left the tree and gave the "tea-cher" call briefly from an adjacent tree. One other bird followed it, but the rest remained where they were. There is some suggestion from this that certain birds may play a dominant role in directing the movements of the flock, at least when going to roost.

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#### 12. DHAMAN (*PTYAS MUCOSUS*) AND PARAKEETS

In the aviary of this department, 40 parakeets (*Psittacula* sp.) were kept for experimental studies. On 14th August 1979 at 11.30 a.m. when we entered the aviary, we found a heavily fed Dhaman snake (*Ptyas mucosus*) of about 8 feet length. The snake

had entered the aviary after 3 p.m. on 13th August, probably through the gap between the doors. The snake had fed so heavily that it was unable to move easily. It was brought to the laboratory and dissected and four parakeets were removed from its stomach.

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